

Political society exists for the sake of noble living. - Aristotle

## Our Only Unicameral

Nebraska is home to the only unicameral, nonpartisan legislature in the nation. A unicameral has only one lawmaking house, rather than a house and a senate.

There are 49 members of the Nebraska Legislature, with each legislator serving a district of roughly equal size. Legislators – called “senators” in Nebraska – are elected to four-year terms. The Unicameral is in session every year and meets for 90 legislative days in odd-numbered years and 60 legislative days in even-numbered years.

In order to preserve the checks and balances of a two-house system, Nebraska’s citizens serve as a check upon the legislative process. The Nebraska Unicameral’s procedures are easy to follow and public hearings provide opportunities for direct citizen input on legislation.

Nebraska also is the only nonpartisan legislature in the nation. This means that a candidate’s political party is not listed on the election ballot; the two candidates who obtain the most votes in the primary election face each other in the general election. Since political parties are not officially represented within the Legislature, leaders are selected from all the members of the Legislature, regardless of party affiliation.



## The Citizen Legislature Works

Not only does unicameralism make Nebraska’s legislature unique, it makes the system efficient, open and accountable.

The Nebraska Unicameral was established with the hope that it would always be accountable to the people. The architects of the system wanted to create a legislative body made up of citizens from across Nebraska – including farmers, teachers, business owners and others – who would travel to the State Capitol each year to make important decisions affecting the state. They also hoped to create a system that would be responsive to the people of Nebraska and would provide opportunities for public input into the legislative process.

Members of the public are allowed to testify at public hearings on legislative bills and can keep track of legislative activities through the Unicameral web site and gavel-to-gavel television coverage of floor activity. Nebraska also provides the press broad access in order to keep the public informed of its actions.

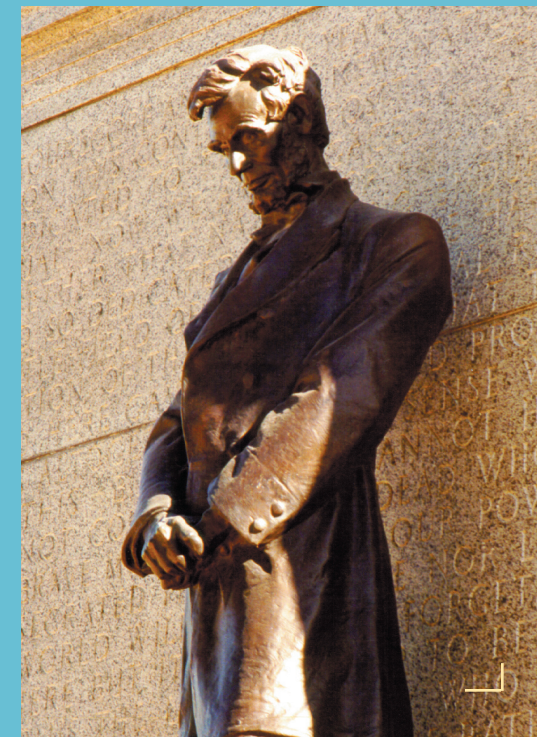
Citizens can impact the process through the committee hearing process and by contacting senators by phone, mail, e-mail or in person. The public is allowed to view legislative proceedings from the lobby of State Capitol Building or the gallery above the George W. Norris Chamber.

**“Every act of the legislature and every act of each individual must be transacted in the spotlight of publicity.”** - George Norris

## Take an Active Role

The unicameral system works best when citizens take time to participate in the process. There are many ways each of us can get involved.

- Vote. Eligible citizens have a responsibility to vote. Encourage others to participate as well.
- Become informed on issues of importance to you and follow bills through the legislative process at [www.nebraskalegislature.gov](http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov). Share your perspective with legislators at committee hearings or by individual contact.
- Work with others to improve your community, school or neighborhood.
- Volunteer to campaign for and support the candidates of your choice.
- Consider public service as a future goal, whether that means running for the Legislature or seeking other public office. Numerous volunteer opportunities also are available on state and community boards and councils.
- Visit [www.nebraskalegislature.gov/education/student\\_programs.php](http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/education/student_programs.php) to learn how to participate in the legislature’s civic education programs.



**“Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”** - Edmund Burke



## Unicameralism vs. Bicameralism

Advocates of the *unicameral* legislature say:

- A unicameral system simplifies the legislative process, making it more understandable for members of the public.
- A conference committee, which reconciles differences in legislation passed by the two houses of a bicameral legislature, conducts its business privately rather than publicly. A unicameral makes this private committee unnecessary.
- Lobbyists also are less influential in a unicameral legislature because the lawmaking process is more public.
- A unicameral system is more economical as it saves the expense of running the second house.
- In a unicameral, one house cannot lay blame for controversial legislation on the other house. Legislators are therefore more accountable to the public and their constituencies.



Advocates of the *bicameral* legislature say:

- A bicameral legislature allows more careful and deliberate consideration of legislation. Requiring action of two houses for passage prevents bills from being passed too quickly, under the sway of emotion.
- Lobbyists are less influential in a bicameral system because influence on legislation is dispersed across a greater number of lawmakers.
- Greater opportunity exists for diverse constituencies to be formally represented in a two-house system.

## Warner Institute for Education in Democracy

Named for the late Nebraska state Sen. Jerome Warner, the Warner Institute for Education in Democracy is a comprehensive collection of civic education programs that includes projects available to teachers and students across the state of Nebraska. It is hoped that students who participate in these programs will gain a greater understanding of their role as citizens and an appreciation for representative democracy.



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## The Nebraska Unicameral: A Citizen's Legislature

